

Identifying Character Traits

Characters do things. They feel things. They hear things. They say things. They think things. They go places. They can walk, run, leap, and jump. They may sit and rock in a rocking chair. They may just lie in bed, sleep, and dream. But the important thing is that characters act.



And these actions show us what kind of people these characters are: friendly, sad, nosey, happy, lovestruck, confused, angry, or inventive.

What is a character trait?

When we talk about a character, we often describe that character in terms of **character traits**, descriptive adjectives like happy or sad that tell us the specific qualities of the character. They're the same kinds of words that we might use to describe ourselves or others, but we're using them to describe fictional characters in something we've read.

The author may tell us these traits directly, but more often the author will show us these traits in action. Our job as readers is to draw a conclusion about the character's traits (*to infer them*) from what the character says, thinks, and does. We might infer a character trait from something a character does only once, or we might draw our conclusions from a series of things the character says and does.

How do we find a character's traits?

An easy way to think about characters is to use a simple chart like the one below. You can start anywhere. There's no wrong way to make your list:

- jot down actions that the character takes then match them with descriptive adjectives in the character traits column.
- list character traits that match your character; then gather a list of actions from the book that support the traits you've listed
- jump back and forth between the columns listing ideas as they come to you; then go back to fill in the matching information for the related column.

For this example, we'll use the character of Harry Potter from *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*.

Actions	Character Trait They Reveal
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• chases Malfoy when he takes Neville's Remembrall• runs to warn Hermione about the Mountain Troll on Halloween and helps Ron fight the Troll• works to protect the Sorcerer's Stone and keep it away from Lord Voldemort	courageous, brave